



Emergency Operations Planning: Integrating the Needs of Students and Staff with Disabilities and Other Access and Functional Needs



U.S. Department of Education
Office of Safe and Healthy Students

Relevance of Topic

Of the 50.1 million students in K-12 schools in the U.S., approximately 6.4 million have one or more disabilities; 95 percent of them attend mainstream schools.

- Not all schools comply with the functional and access requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)
- Students, staff, and others with disabilities and other access and functional needs may face unique challenges when responding to an emergency situation as regard to their:
 - Awareness of alert systems;
 - Clear understanding of the emergency situation;
 - Mobility; and
 - Communication.

A comprehensive emergency operations plan must account for the entire school community.

Range and Types of Disabilities and Access and Functional Needs

Types of Disabilities and Access and Functional Needs:

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Sensory○ Physical○ Cognitive/Developmental | <ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Speech/Language○ Social/Emotional/Behavioral |
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Range of Disabilities and Access and Functional Needs

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Mild to severe○ Apparent or not obvious | <ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Short- or long term○ Singular or multiple |
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Identify the Core Planning Team and Form a Common Framework

Identify Core Planning Team – Consider including the following individuals:

- School staff, such as teachers, counselors, school nurses, IEP case managers, school psychologists, and transportation providers;
- Students and staff with disabilities or other access and functional needs, or their representatives;
- Community partners, such as first responders, mental and public health professionals, and individuals from organizations that represent individuals with disabilities.

Form a Common Framework

Nine Areas to Guide a Site Assessment

- Personal health needs
- Getting around (wheelchairs)
- Transportation (specialized car/van)
- Electricity dependence
- Disaster debris
- Evacuation difficulty (e.g., from a floor above ground-level)
- Building exits
- Service animals
- Communication

From the American Red Cross publication, *Disaster Preparedness for People with Disabilities*.

Conducting a Capacity Assessment

Check alert systems:

Are they appropriate and relevant?

Are these tested during drills and exercises?

Ensure that essential supplies and equipment are onsite:

For example, evacuation chairs for schools without elevators.

Evacuation Annex

Evacuation considerations:

- Can the individual navigate an exit route unassisted?
- Will the individual know the exit route, even when not able to see it?
- What are the alternative exit routes, devices, or assistance procedures?

Considerations related to lending assistance:

- Provide staff training on the appropriate procedures to lend assistance.
- Plan for guide dogs to be evacuated with their owners.
- Consider special transportation needs.

Other Considerations:

- Food and water.
- Medications, medical equipment, and supplies.*

*Connects to Public Health, Medical, and Mental Health Annex

Evacuation Annex (cont.)

Prepare Go-Kits:



Stockpile essential emergency supplies.

Ensure that go-kits meet the needs of the individual student or staff member with the disability or access and functional need.

Check your inventory periodically to ensure that equipment and supplies are in working order.

Lockdown Annex

Lockdown considerations:

- Classroom size must be large enough to allow students and staff to move away from windows and doors.
- Students with mobility impairments can be moved to the interior of the classroom.

Shelter-in-Place Annex

Considerations for sheltering in place:

- Access to toilets.
- Availability of medications.
- Food and necessary feeding equipment are accessible.
- Accommodations have been made for service animals.
- Appropriate activities for keeping students occupied are on-hand.
- Staff-to-student ratio is appropriate for extended stay in classroom.

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Family Reunification Annex

Considerations for addressing the needs of the entire school community during family reunification procedures include:

- Re-locating students to safe areas;
- Using staff who recognize students as well as parents and guardians;
- Following release procedures with parents and caretakers; and
- Implementing an established documentation process.

Exercise the Plan

Practice evacuations, lockdowns, and shelter-in-place response procedures to ensure that:

- All populations are planned for adequately; and
- First responders are familiar with the unique needs of persons with disabilities and others with access and functional needs.

Practice Conducting Drills and Exercises Using:

- American Sign Language
- Tactile sign
- Limited vision/communication
- Picture books
- Braille
- Closed Circuit Television (CCTV)
- Computer-assisted communication
- Electronic text messaging